

LLOYD “PAPPY” SHAW – AND HERE WE ARE TODAY

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Colorado occupies a unique position in the history of square dancing. Primarily due to the efforts of one man, Lloyd “Pappy” Shaw and his wife Dorothy Stott Shaw. The Shaw’s lived in Colorado Springs and Pappy was the principal and superintendent of the small Cheyenne Mountain School District.

Square dancing evolved a western version probably sometime in the late 1800s when the pioneers moved to settle the states west of the Mississippi. It was a square dance form that was much different than the Eastern Quadrilles and different still than the Kentucky Running Set which was probably the other origin source. It was more exuberant and much less formal than the quadrilles in the East. Many of the figures came directly from the Kentucky Running Set but they were done in squares instead of a big circle. For a time, square dances were quite popular in the farming communities

throughout the West and even in some of the larger cities.

By the 1920s, the popularity of going to square dances or barn dances had started to fade. The easier transportation provided by the trains and the “tin lizzie” brought in more sophisticated entertainment. There were other things for people to do. (Does this sound familiar?) By the 1930s western style square dancing could only be found in small pockets in rural areas throughout the West.

Pappy coached a championship football team in his small school, but he was unhappy with the arrogant attitude he saw developing in his football players, so he turned to dancing as a means of providing a coed physical recreation program for the students.

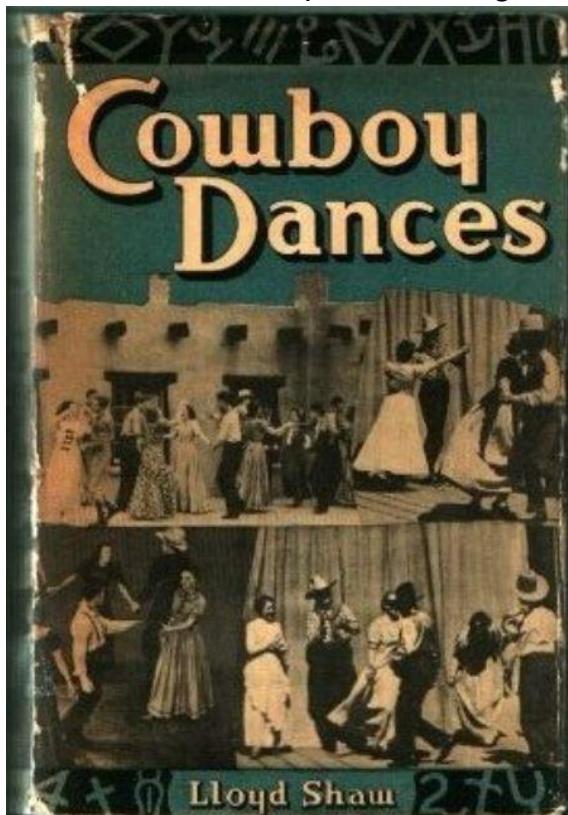


At first, he had great success with folk dancing and other dances imported for the eastern U.S. However, he had heard rumors of something called “square dancing” that was still being done in the small towns in surrounding area. He and Dorothy started attending a few dances

and discovered a uniquely American form of dance that captured both their hearts.

The students in Pappy's and Dorothy's schools danced from first grade all the way through high school. Pappy started collecting square dance figures (routines) on scrap pieces of paper and taking them back to teach the students in his schools. They loved them. Soon square dancing became part of the exhibitions the students were frequently asked to perform throughout the State of Colorado. Everywhere they went, the audience clamored for information and soon square dance clubs were cropping up all over. Keep in mind that these dances not only included squares, but also many other dance forms.

In 1939 Pappy published a book named "Cowboy Dances." It was filled with his observations about square dancing and



contained many dance routines. This book became the primary dance resource for callers everywhere because, up until that time, the dance

routines had only been passed from caller to caller in oral form.

By documenting the dance routines, he collected from the old callers, the same knowledge became available to everyone.

During the summer of 1939, the Cheyenne Mountains Dancers took their first trip outside of the State of Colorado and toured several States to the East. Their show included not only square dancing, but also Lancers, Mazurkas, Waltzes, Singing Quadrilles, Mexican Dances, the Kentucky Running Set and other dances.

Bob Cook of Boulder Colorado in 1972 wrote in Square Dance Magazine about his experiences dancing with Cheyenne Dancers during these years. Bob attended Cheyenne Mountain schools for 13 years from the second grade through graduation from high school in 1941.

"Lloyd Shaw's "Cowboy" Dance began with all the ruggedly individualistic traits of Frontier Man. No two of his dancers were costumed the same, nor were any two dancing styles the same. Each of us, in those early years, retained his identity both in dress and mannerism, dancing as we pleased so long as our timing was perfect, and the patterns exact. Extra spins, jigs, etc. were encouraged so long as the dance formations remained exact at all times. Ours was the day of the garish solid colored satin shirt, the silk handkerchief knotted tightly at the throat and trailing behind us. The girls wore long dresses, full in the skirt and of various colors, occasionally sporting a pair of old-fashioned full length pantaloons, but more often not. We wore genuine high-heeled boots of a type rarely manufactured today and prided ourselves in trying to have the brightest, most non-conforming shirt or skirt among

the eight couples of exhibition dancers. By modern standards, the early Cheyenne Dancers were a somewhat motley crew."

The Cheyenne Mountain Dancers show (above) was wildly popular and Pappy started getting requests to start a class where people could come to learn how to teach these dances. The first of Pappy's famous "summer classes" was held in 1940 and had 40 women and one man.



Photos above and below are from the 1951 Lloyd Shaw Summer School in Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado



All these dancers came from largely the Chicago area. Following classes quickly grew to 90 members and then to multiple sessions each summer to meet the demand. Many leaders attended several summer sessions over the years.

As the Cheyenne Mountain Dances toured all over the United States, leaders flooded in to learn about this great American dance and then go home to

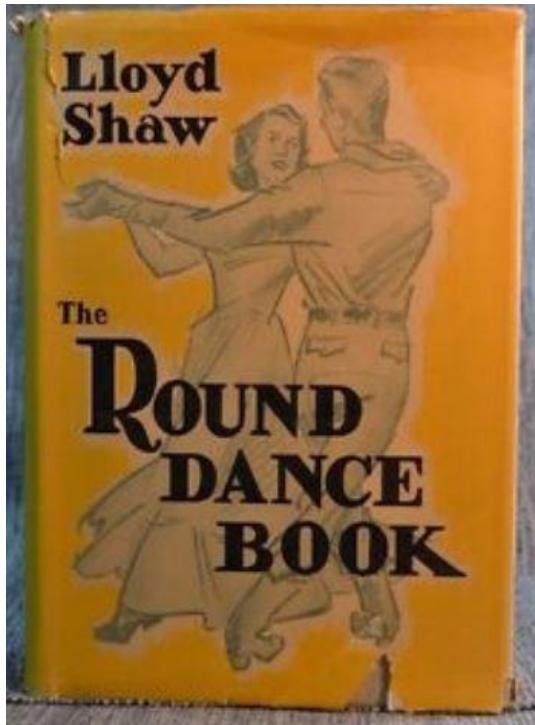
start their own square dance clubs. Virtually every popular caller of the time attended one or more of these six-day sessions.

They continued to be held each summer from 1940 until Pappy's death in 1958. After that, Dorothy continued with the Lloyd Shaw Fellowship and eventually the Lloyd Shaw Foundation which still holds weeklong events to this day. One of the interesting dynamics of the Shaw's was that after Lloyd died, Dorothy became a driving force for dancing that was equal, in the minds of many people, to Lloyd's contributions.

The summer classes were not like the "callers' schools" of the present day. Bob Osgood, the editor of Square Dance Magazine, once told me that they didn't learn dances and calling as much as they learned how to dance. The philosophy behind the recreation. Pappy had a joy for life that extended way beyond dancing. He communicated these ideals to the leaders he taught and for many years it was communicated on to their dancers. Some of this philosophy can be seen in the following quote by Dr. Shaw published in the November 1963 edition of Square Dance Magazine.

"Rhythm is the essence of all true dancing! Without rhythm, you are not dancing! And with poor uncertain rhythm you are dancing very poorly indeed. It doesn't matter quite as much with beginners. But with experienced dancers you should become more experienced with rhythm with each step you take. This silent seeking for perfect rhythm will keep you dancing all your lives, and still seeking the truths that lie beyond it. But ignore the rhythm, make it secondary, seek for the outward forms of style only, and you will soon tire of the game and quit forever."

In 1948 Lloyd Shaw published a second book titled "The Round Dance Book." This book enjoyed the same popularity as "Cowboy Dances."



It documented over 100 round dances and mixers. Many of them are still being danced today. In addition, Lloyd Shaw Recordings and the Lloyd Shaw Foundation still produce many books and recordings.

Directly due to the influence of Lloyd Shaw and Dorothy Shaw, the first NSDC held in Colorado, in 1959, featured a pageant of dance history covering over 200 years and many square dance related dance forms. Dance teams participated from all over the world. The pageant had over 500 people in the cast and the MC was the great cartoonist, Chuck Jones. Only one other international pageant has ever been held at a NSDC. Anaheim, CA in 1976.

(BTM Editor's Note: Chuck Jones was a regular cover artist for Sets in Order Magazine and is best known for his work with Warner Bros. Cartoons on the Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies shorts.)



The Colorado connection doesn't end there. By the time you are reading this, the Lloyd Shaw Foundation Archives will be housed in the Carson-Brierly Dance Library in the Penrose Library at the University of Denver. This may be the largest collection of square dance and round dance related material in world. It includes over 100,000 books, magazines, and records.

All of this started with two people's desire to explore a unique American dance form. Their willingness to make the effort to document and then teach others about square and round dancing resulted in seeds being planted that have generated thousands and thousands of dancers over the years.

From one book and a group of enthusiastic kids a worldwide recreation was resurrected from near extinction and has flourished for many years. Certainly, not all of this was entirely due to the Shaw's efforts, but square dancing and round dancing probably would not have had nearly the impact on the American and worldwide public without their contributions. And it all started here in Colorado.